

by Grenadier

THE WORLD'S NATIONAL ANTHEMS

Part III - Europe, minorities and anomalies

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In any community, be it village, school, factory or office most of the people conform to the characteristics of one or more major groups, but here and there are members who differ in certain respects because of upbringing, parentage, environment etc.

This is true of countries which, of course, consist of people and if all the nations whose national anthems conform to their Teuton, Latin or Slav races are taken away from Europe, there remains a residue of states whose different heritage is reflected in their national hymns.

Long ago in the 8th century populations migrated from Central Asia and settled in Europe to form the present day countries of Hungary, Turkey and Finland (with Estonia). One might expect, therefore, some similarities between certain of these anthems, and one would be correct.

The present national anthems of Hungary and Turkey are both slow "dreamy" tunes, and parts of each tune sound similar to one another. Hungary's Anthem, the "Magyar Himnusz" was composed in 1844 by Ferenc (=Frank in English) Erkel, Director of the Hungarian National Academy of Music, and Founder of the National Association of Hungarian Choirs. It is not surprising that such professionalism won first prize in a national competition for a National Anthem in 1844.

The "Magyar Himnusz" is remarkable for having remained the Hungarian Anthem after the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1918 and through the Regency period before and during World War II under Admiral Horthy, until its collapse in 1945, and finally for over 30 years in the Communist People's Republic in the tight grip of Soviet Russia. In the past, the playing of the "Magyar Himnusz" on solemn occasions have been followed by Egressy's "Szozat" (Salute).

Turkey's present National Anthem, the "Istiklal Marsi" (March of Independence) dates from 1923, when a Republic was declared under Kemal Ataturk and is a slow march, sounding similar to the "Dead March".

Before 1923 each succeeding Turkish Sultan used his own favourite piece of music for the National Anthem, and this resulted in a variety of tunes which were quite un-typical of Turkey. Until I knew this fact, it was a great puzzle as to why old books of national anthems printed before 1920 each contained a different Anthem for Turkey. The most engaging one musically was the "Sultani March" of the last Sultan composed for him by an Egyptian. Turks had to sing the chosen anthem without question such was the absolute power of the Sultan. This terrible power was described to me once by an old University porter, who as a lad in the Royal Navy took part in a courtesy visit to Turkey in 1911. He personally witnessed the decapitation of a young peasant girl by a soldier of the Imperial Guard for causing one of the horses pulling the glittering carriage to shy.

Finland and Estonia sing their Anthems to the same melody which was composed by the Finnish violinist Fredrick Pacius in 1848, and in May that year a gathering of students sung the text written by Finland's National Poet Johann Runeberg, to Pacius' tune. The Finnish National Anthem, "Oi Maame" (Our land) was born!

Estonia's Anthem, "Mu isamaa, mu õnn ja rõõm" (My native land, my joy and delight) had a similar introduction to national anthem status for it was sung at a National Singing Festival in July 1869. However, it was not until independence in 1918 that the text written by Janssen to Pacius' tune became the National Anthem of Estonia officially.

If one looks at the texts of Finland's and Estonia's Anthems, it is obvious that the language differs greatly from those of the neighbouring Teutonic countries of Scandinavia, one of the differences being the double a as in Maame and isamaa.

In 1940 Estonia became part of the USSR and since 1945 the Russian

National Anthem has been used officially inside the country.

Latvia and Lithuania belong to the Lette race. Their Anthems are steady majestic tunes, with some repetition of phrases, in a somewhat similar style and tempo to "God Save the Queen".

Latvia's National Anthem, "Dievs sveti Latviju" (God bless Latvia), was initially entered for a singing festival in Riga (the old capital) in 1873 and its immediate appeal soon elevated it to national anthem status.

Wherever it was heard, people stood and joined in, the men with bared heads. The fervency of the Latvian Anthem was similar to that of the Polish one, and strangely Latvia's was one of the very few national anthems that their Russian Tsarist rulers would tolerate. However, they insisted that the Anthem "God Protect the Tsar" had to accompany the Latvian Anthem on any official occasion, for then as now, Latvia was very much under the Russian heel. The tune was the official Anthem of Latvia from 1918, when independence was gained, until 1940 when the country was again annexed by Russia.

Lithuania adjoins Latvia, and has shared her fluctuating fortunes. The Lithuanian Anthem "Lietuva tevyne musu" (Lithuania, my Country) was composed in 1896 by Kudirka who was inspired by the singing of a band of pilgrims before the Holy Shrine of the Virgin Mary at Vilna's East Gate. Like Latvia, Lithuania used her Anthem officially from her independence in 1918, until annexation by Russia in 1940.

The ancient country of Greece has the distinction shared with Britian, Hungary, Poland etc. of being "monanthemous" (i.e. has only had one official anthem), unlike her neighbours Bulgaria, Turkey and Yugoslavia. Greece's Anthem, the "Hymn to Freedom" was composed by Mantzaros and was submitted to professional musical scrutiny in Germany before being adopted as the National Anthem in 1864 by the choice of King George I of the Hellenes. As regards its text, it is noteworthy in being the longest for it contains 158 verses!

There are a few interesting anomalies in Europe. One of them is Albania, a very primitive country wedged against the Adriatic by Yugoslavia

and Greece.

The Albanian Anthem is called "Hymni i Flamurit" (Hymn to the Flag) and was composed in 1880 by Porumbescu while Albania was still under Turkish rule which lasted from 1467 to 1912 and gave the Ottoman Empire its elite Albanian warrior Corps. When Albania became free after the Balkan War of 1912, the "Hymni i Flamurit" was adopted officially, and is still the present National Anthem of Enver Hoxha's Communist regime. The tune is a catchy one, quite short, in martial tempo and in a style suggesting the old Royal Anthem of Egypt (which every serving British Soldier in Egypt during World War II used to know). The anomaly is that it reflects the type of Anthem used by some Arab countries, and indeed, Albania's religion is 70% Muslim, inherited from Turkish occupation no doubt. A recording of the Albanian Anthem is impossible to buy commercially (even in Albania, which I am told has hardly any shops, even in the capital Tirana) but a colleague of mine managed to tape it from a close-down of Radio Tirana at 1.55a.m.!

The National Anthem of San Marino, an ancient but erstwhile Communist mountain republic in north east Italy (founded in AD 301) is a slow solemn melody, contrasting with the lively Anthems of Latin Countries. I tried twice to obtain a recording from their National Tourist and Information Office, but twice I was bombarded with a dozen copies of travel brochures!

Coming nearer to home the Republic of Ireland has the martial "Soldiers' Song" for her National Anthem. It is reminiscent of "Sussex by the Sea", and would fit a Latin country. Now there is nothing Latin about the origins of that proud Celtic Country but it is suggested that much Latin blood has been fused with Ireland by way of visiting expeditions from France, Italy and especially Spain over the past 400 years - in one historical occurrence much of the remains of the Spanish Armada ended up in Western Ireland. The existence of a strong Roman Catholic Church is another indication of "Latinization".

Finally the famous Welsh tune "Land of my Fathers", which was first sung at the Llangollen Eisteddfod in 1858, is used as a National Anthem in Brittany, although "La Marseillaise" is the official Anthem for that part of France.

The reader of Parts I, II and III of this series will no doubt have noted that if the tune of any state's National Anthem is used abroad, it is always kept within the race stock of the people of its original country. If any reader of this series is desirous of hearing any Anthem, the author would be pleased to oblige if a cassette could be sent to the Editor of Spectrum addressed to Grenadier.